

Arab summit lends support to U.S. Gulf policy

by Jeffrey Steinberg

As Caspar Weinberger was preparing to leave office after seven years as America's most effective postwar defense secretary, Arab leaders who gathered in Amman, Jordan were taking steps to ensure that his Persian Gulf policy would continue in effect after his formal departure from the Reagan administration.

Reports from Washington intelligence sources, confirmed by subsequent press accounts, indicate that the Nov. 8-11 Arab League summit focused principally on two agenda items, both pivotal to the continued pursuit of Weinberger's reassertion of American power in the Middle East.

1) The thorough isolation of Iran from the international community, after its barbaric provocations against its Arab neighbors, beginning with the July 31, 1987 riots in Mecca, Saudi Arabia.

2) The reopening of full diplomatic relations with Egypt, broken by most Arab nations nine years ago, when Anwar Sadat signed the Camp David Accords with Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin and U.S. President Jimmy Carter.

The denunciation of the Teheran regime by a unanimous vote of the 21 Arab League members was particularly significant in light of the fact that all such previous efforts had been blocked by Syrian President Hafez Assad.

According to U.S. intelligence sources, Assad was confronted with a straightforward threat that hundreds of millions of dollars of annual Saudi aid, funds that keep the economically crippled Syrian state intact, would be instantly cut off if he balked at the Arab League stance.

The seriousness of the threat, according to these sources, was underscored by the fact that the message to this effect was delivered by Crown Prince Abdullah, rather than King

Fahd. Married to the sister-in-law of Rifaat Assad, the President's brother and the chief of Syrian intelligence, Abdullah is known to be Syria's most powerful and sympathetic voice within the Saudi royal family. His backing of the hardline anti-Iranian position carried a great deal of weight with the Assads—especially since the Crown Prince attended the Amman summit on the heels of a highly publicized trip to Washington, D.C., where he met with Weinberger, among other Reagan administration officials.

The second dramatic event, the freeing of the Arab League member-states to reestablish diplomatic ties with Cairo if they wished, has equally profound implications for Middle East security. While Syria has announced that it will not reestablish such ties, for now, before the close of the summit, the United Arab Emirates had announced the immediate restoration of diplomatic relations. Among the other League members expected to follow suit within days or weeks are Bahrain, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Morocco, and Tunisia.

The fact that the majority of member-states of the Gulf Cooperation Council are the first states to restore ties to Cairo is, according to senior U.S. intelligence sources, of special significance. While details have not yet been confirmed, there are reports circulating that Egypt could play a direct and potentially decisive role in the unfolding Gulf crisis. Only Egypt, among the Arab states, has the military force to serve as a meaningful complement to direct U.S. military presence. The recently concluded Washington-Cairo agreement whereby Egypt will begin co-production of the American M-1 tank is an important signal of Egypt's reemergence as a major American military partner in the region.

The post-Camp David era

The forceful and unified anti-Khomeini stance of the Arab League members, accomplished through ganging up on Syria's Assad, is being widely recognized as a "phase change" in Middle East politics.

Washington Post correspondent Patrick E. Tyler, writing from Amman, Jordan on Nov. 11, had this to say: "But beyond the financial commitment that Syria desperately needs, the Amman summit overnight appears to have created a new balance of power in the Middle East that Syria cannot afford to abandon.

"The escalating Gulf War has forged a new alliance of Egypt, Iraq, and the richest Gulf Arab states, and this alliance threatens to overshadow the important role Syria has played in Arab affairs since the late Egyptian President Anwar Sadat decided to break with the Arab majority in 1978 and concluded his own peace treaty with Israel at the urging of the United States."

Thus, the U.S. Gulf policy, which remains a bright spot in the Reagan administration's otherwise floundering foreign policy agenda, represents an historic turn away from the disastrous Camp David era. The sustained commitment to Gulf security, despite the fact that no singularly bold assaults have been launched by American forces against hard Iranian military or economic targets, has had a profound impact on the Arab world. Soviet diplomatic advances among moderate Arab states, which had been the hallmark of Mikhail Gorbachov's first two years in power (1985-86), had come as the result of the Arab conviction, growing in the wake of the turn-tail U.S. policy after the Beirut massacre of Marines, that the United States was finished as a power capable of defending Western interests in the Gulf and the Eastern Mediterranean.

With American and Western European warships now patrolling every corner of the Gulf, that conviction has been reversed 180 degrees. U.S. intelligence sources, speaking off the record with *EIR*, say that Secretary Weinberger has used the Gulf security deployment, guaranteeing the flow of oil to Western Europe and Japan, as the means to assure America's allies of Washington's unflinching commitment to NATO, despite the countervailing purposes of the State Department. At the same time, Weinberger placed the Europeans in the position of having to support and join in the reflagging efforts—even at the expense of lucrative economic deals with Teheran—in order to evince their own commitment to NATO.

Another by-product of the post-Camp David transition is the distancing of U.S. Gulf and Arab-world policy from that of Israel. According to Gulf sources, last month, General Tod, the former Israeli Air Force chief of staff, traveled to Teheran to negotiate new arms deals with the Khomeini regime. The package reportedly included Israeli plans to build a large radar installation inside Iran. The Israelis attempted to sell the package to Washington on the basis that Israel

would provide valuable signal intelligence on Soviet activities along the U.S.S.R.'s borders with Turkey, Iran, and Afghanistan. But it is the widely held view is that Israel will primarily direct the radar monitoring against the Arab world, thus de facto deepening Israel's military collusion with Khomeini.

Ever since the arrest of Jonathan Jay Pollard in Washington as an Israeli spy, in November 1985, the Weinberger-led elements within U.S. intelligence have moved to shut Israel out of access to America's most sensitive signal intelligence. This has also contributed to a growing sense among pro-American Arab states that the United States can once again be trusted.

Teheran's next move

From the very outset of the American reflagging effort last July, Moscow has been forced to shift its Gulf and Middle East policy increasingly toward one of playing out its Iranian and Israeli "cards" at the expense of its hard-fought openings with Arab states. Moscow hoped that, ultimately, the United States would become bogged down in an endless Gulf shipping lanes patrol that would drain resources and open up other regional flanks for irregular warfare. At the same time, Moscow itself was drawn deeper and deeper into a pressure game with Teheran, keeping the crazy Khomeini regime from giving the United States the *casus belli* for a decisive, justified military retaliatory strike against Iran.

Moscow has succeeded so far in forestalling an incident that might force Gorbachov to cancel the summit with President Reagan and jettison the INF treaty. However, the Arab League action of Nov. 8-11 now places enormous pressure on the Khomeini regime, which is likely to make a "flight forward" response in the Gulf war. Responding to the Arab League call for Iran to submit to the terms of United Nations Resolution 598—a cease-fire and a cut-off of all military aid to intransigent parties in the war—the Iranian Supreme War Support Council issued a call on Nov. 12 for a renewed offensive against Iraq. According to the *Washington Post* of Nov. 13, Western intelligence sources report a massing of Iranian troops and equipment across from the Iraqi river port of Basra. An Iranian ground offensive there is expected to start before the end of the year.

U.S. intelligence sources have confidently reported to *EIR* that the strongest area of policy continuity between outgoing Defense Secretary Weinberger and his handpicked successor, Frank Carlucci, is the Gulf deployment. The fact that former Weinberger chief of staff Gen. Colin Powell is the new National Security Adviser adds a further measure of continuity to the final year of the Reagan presidency. With the Teheran regime facing unprecedented challenges from a unified Arab world under a diminished Syrian influence, and with the promise of a growing role for militarily powerful Egypt, one can expect events in the Gulf to take on a growing importance as the Dec. 7 superpower summit approaches.